



NIDCD Fact Sheet | Hearing and Balance

Your Baby's Hearing and Communicative Development Checklist

Some babies are born with hearing problems. Other children are born with normal hearing and begin to have hearing problems as they grow older.

It's important to know what to expect as your baby grows, because hearing problems can delay the development of voice, speech, and language skills. The checklist at the end of this fact sheet presents the average age by which most babies accomplish a variety of early speech and language skills. Typically, a child may not accomplish all the items in an age category until he or she reaches the upper age in the age range.

Find your child's age range in the checklist. Check "yes" or "no" for each item. After you complete the checklist, if any of the items are checked "no," show it to your child's doctor. Tell the doctor if you think your child has trouble hearing.

Talk to your doctor

If you think your child may have a hearing problem, here are some things that your doctor might ask you about:

- ▶ Do others in the family, including brothers or sisters, have a hearing problem?
- ▶ Did the child's mother have medical problems in pregnancy or delivery (experienced a serious illness or injury or needed drugs or medications)?
- ▶ Was the child born early?
- ▶ How much did the child weigh at birth?
- ▶ Did the child have physical problems at birth?



A 4- to 6-month-old baby with normal hearing development will follow sounds with his or her eyes.

- ▶ Does the child rub or pull on his or her ear(s) often?
- ▶ Has the child ever had scarlet fever?
- ▶ Has the child ever had meningitis?
- ▶ How many ear infections has the child had in the past year?
- ▶ How often does the child have colds, allergic symptoms, or ear infections?

Some words the doctor may use are:

- ▶ Audiogram: a chart that shows how well you can hear.
- ▶ Audiologist: a person who tests and measures hearing.
- ▶ Earache: pain deep inside the ear.
- ▶ Otitis media: middle ear infection.
- ▶ Otolaryngologist: a doctor who treats diseases and problems of the ear, nose, and throat.
- ▶ Otologist: a doctor who treats diseases of the ear.
- ▶ Pediatrician: a doctor who takes care of infants and children and who treats their diseases.
- ▶ Speech-language pathologist: a health professional trained to evaluate and treat people with speech or language disorders.

What are voice, speech, and language?

Voice, speech, and language are the tools we use to communicate with each other.

Voice is the sound we make as air from our lungs is pushed between vocal folds in our larynx, causing them to vibrate.

Speech is talking, which is one way to express language. It involves the precisely coordinated muscle actions of the tongue, lips, jaw, and vocal tract to produce the recognizable sounds that make up language.

Language is a set of shared rules that allow people to express their ideas in a meaningful way. Language may be expressed verbally or by writing, signing, or making other gestures, such as eye blinking or mouth movements.

Birth to 3 Months

YES NO

- Reacts to loud sounds
- Calms down or smiles when spoken to
- Recognizes your voice and calms down if crying
- When feeding, starts or stops sucking in response to sound
- Coos and makes pleasure sounds
- Has a special way of crying for different needs
- Smiles when he or she sees you

4 to 6 Months

YES NO

- Follows sounds with his or her eyes
- Responds to changes in the tone of your voice
- Notices toys that make sounds
- Pays attention to music
- Babbles in a speech-like way and uses many different sounds, including sounds that begin with p, b, and m
- Laughs
- Babbles when excited or unhappy
- Makes gurgling sounds when alone or playing with you

7 Months to 1 Year

YES NO

- Enjoys playing peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake
- Turns and looks in the direction of sounds
- Listens when spoken to
- Understands words for common items such as "cup," "shoe," or "juice"
- Responds to requests ("Come here")
- Babbles using long and short groups of sounds ("tata, upup, bibibi")
- Babbles to get and keep attention
- Communicates using gestures such as waving or holding up arms
- Imitates different speech sounds
- Has one or two words ("Hi," "dog," "Dada," or "Mama") by first birthday

1 to 2 Years

YES NO

- Knows a few parts of the body and can point to them when asked
- Follows simple commands (“Roll the ball”) and understands simple questions (“Where’s your shoe?”)
- Enjoys simple stories, songs, and rhymes
- Points to pictures, when named, in books
- Acquires new words on a regular basis
- Uses some one- or two-word questions (“Where kitty?” or “Go bye-bye?”)
- Puts two words together (“More cookie”)
- Uses many different consonant sounds at the beginning of words

2 to 3 Years

YES NO

- Has a word for almost everything
- Uses two- or three-word phrases to talk about and ask for things
- Uses k, g, f, t, d, and n sounds
- Speaks in a way that is understood by family members and friends
- Names objects to ask for them or to direct attention to them

3 to 4 Years

YES NO

- Hears you when you call from another room
- Hears the television or radio at the same sound level as other family members
- Answers simple “Who?” “What?” “Where?” and “Why?” questions
- Talks about activities at daycare, preschool, or friends’ homes
- Uses sentences with four or more words
- Speaks easily without repeating syllables or words

4 to 5 Years

YES NO

- Pays attention to a short story and answers simple questions about it
- Hears and understands most of what is said at home and in school
- Uses sentences that give many details
- Tells stories that stay on topic
- Communicates easily with other children and adults
- Says most sounds correctly except for a few (l, s, r, v, z, ch, sh, and th)
- Uses rhyming words
- Names some letters and numbers
- Uses adult grammar

This checklist is based upon *How Does Your Child Hear and Talk?*, courtesy of the American Speech–Language–Hearing Association.



Where can I find additional information about hearing development?

The NIDCD maintains a directory of organizations that provide information on the normal and disordered processes of hearing, balance, taste, smell, voice, speech, and language. Visit the NIDCD website at <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov> to search the directory.

Use the following keywords to help you find organizations that can answer questions and provide printed or electronic information on hearing development:

- ▶ Audiologist
- ▶ Early identification of hearing loss in children
- ▶ Speech-language pathologists

More NIDCD fact sheets on Hearing and Balance:

- ▶ Communication Considerations for Parents of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children
- ▶ Communication Problems in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ▶ Speech and Language Developmental Milestones
- ▶ Specific Language Impairment
- ▶ What to Do if Your Baby's Screening Reveals a Possible Hearing Problem

Visit the NIDCD website at <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov> to read, print, or download fact sheets.

For more information, additional addresses and phone numbers, or a printed list of organizations, contact us at:

NIDCD Information Clearinghouse

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The NIDCD supports and conducts research and research training on the normal and disordered processes of hearing, balance, taste, smell, voice, speech, and language and provides health information, based upon scientific discovery, to the public.



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